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# LETTER

TO A

## Member of Parliament

Concerning the

## African Trade.

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SIR,  
IN Obedience to your Command, I pray leave to lay before you some Observations on the present State of the *African Trade*.

The last Sessions of Parliament the Royal *African Company* applied to the House of Commons under pretext of divers frivolous Arguments and Suggestions, that they might be establish'd, and that all others might be excluded from the *African Trade*, which was laid open to all Subjects of *England* in the late Reign of King *William* of Glorious Memory, or that otherwise they could carry on that Trade no longer, meaning that they must become Bankrupt.

But after a full Hearing at the Bar, they could make out nothing they pretended to; and on the contrary, the Separate Traders fully proved the said Company had been a continual Hindrance to the Trade in general, in the following Instances.

- I. By having made an Agreement with the *French* for a Neutrality during this War, wherein the Separate Traders were not included, but their Ships were taken by the Enemy where-ever they were met with, and Prizes taken by *English Separate Ships* were taken from the Captors by the Company's Agent in *Gambo*, and restored to the Enemy again.
- II. By framing fictitious Accounts of the Money paid by the Separate Traders, appointed by Act of Parliament for maintaining the Settlements on the Coast.
- III. By discouraging the Natives on the Gold Coast from trading with Separate Ships, and taking away the Goods they bought of them, burning the Town of *John Cabez*, and the Town of *Congo*, for the same reason, and building a small Fort on the Ruins, to prevent the Natives carrying Corn on board Separate Ships, and trading with them; while at the same time they encouraged the *Portuguese Ships*, and took off their Loading of *Brazile* Commodities, and loaded divers of the said Vessels with *Negroes*.
- IV. By their Agents seizing Separate Ships in a Piratical manner, without any Cause, on purpose to discourage the Separate Traders, while they suffered the *French* to settle Factories on the River *Gambo*, some 100 Leagues above their Fort, whereby the Trade of the North part of *Guinea* is almost lost.

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V. By their Agent, Sir D. Thomas seizing and imprisoning a whole Tribe of Up-land Merchants, for trading with Separate Ships, tho' the Company had no Goods to sell them, and keeping their *Grometto's* and Soldiers belonging to their Forts patrolling Night and Day, to prevent the Natives from going off to Separate Ships to trade with them.

'Twas farther proved by their Instructions given to their Agents, that they encouraged the making Sugar, Ginger, Cotton, and other *West Indian* Commodities, in *Africa*, which would entirely ruin our Colonies in a little time.

Many other Crimes were also made appear, too tedious for the Compass of this Paper.

The Separate Traders also made it appear, that since the Trade was opened, they increased it Five times more than when 'twas Exclusive; among other Instances, that they had supplied the Province of *Maryland* (where the Company never did carry any Negroes, neither before the opening the Trade nor since) with as many Negroes as make 30000 Hogsheads of Tobacco a Year, of the best sort, fit for foreign Markets: Whereas before opening the Trade to *Africa*, the Planters there, Owners of many 1000 Acres of good Land, were obliged to work barefoot and bareleg'd in cultivating their own Grounds themselves, and were resolv'd to have deserted that Province, had they not been supplied with Negro Servants.

They made it appear also, that most of the Negroes are purchased at *Widda*, *Calabar*, and *Angola*, and between *Cape Mount* and the *Gold Coast*, where the Company have no Fort. So that,

After a mature Debate, the House was pleased to Resolve, *That the Trade to Africa should be free and open under some Regulations.*

And ordered a Bill to be brought in accordingly, which was read twice; but the House being prorogued, it went then no farther.

Since which the Company continue to oppress the Traders by all means they can think of, and have had the Success to silence their Creditors, under pretence of their being in Treaty for an Exclusive Trade, on finding Means to lend 50000*l.* which they assured them, they could not fail of obtaining, if the said Creditors would but be silent, and but seem to join in it, and come into an imaginary Coalition of their Bonds to their Stock; owning at the same time, that the Instrument of Coalition having no Penalty, was not binding, and if it was, yet one Clause therein renders it at once insignificant, *viz.* that if every one of the Bonds don't come in, the Coalition is void.

However this piece of Stock-jobbing *Fineness*, tho' not half finished, hath had this Effect besides gaining Time;

It hath prevented some of the Creditors from suing their Bonds, while others in the Secret have got Judgment, and recover'd theirs.

It hath given opportunity to some to manage the Effects abroad, and to others to get out with little Loss at home.

It hath produced a Proposal for lending 50000*l.* for an Exclusive Trade, which requires some Remarks, and worth while to consider the Consequences.

1. 'Tis to be supposed the Company will not lend the Money for nothing, and a Fund must be given to pay *6 per Cent.* Interest till the Principal shall be repaid, which may be had of any body at that rate; or if *7 per Cent.* is given, the Principal may be paid *7 Years hence*: and if so, then the Difference is but *5000 l. per annum* saved between the one and the other.

If 'tis objected, That giving one *per Cent.* more on one Fund than another, will prejudice other Loans. In that respect 'tis to be feared this would much more prejudice other Funds, and the *African* Company must give *10 per Cent.* or more for Money, if they lend it at *6*, and not get it neither, an Instance whereof we had about two Years since, when another Company, tho' with a very good Bottom, and in a most flourishing Condition, was forc'd to give *6 per Cent.* Interest, and *2 per Cent.* Discount for Money to lend the Government, which had such an Effect on all Government-Security, that it brought most of them to a Discount also, and raised the Interest of those Funds ever since. But suppose the worst, and that that Sum cannot be found any other way, and if we should be even without it, is such a Sum as 50000*l.* so great an Addition to the General Debt? We owed 17 Millions at the end of the last War, and thank God we have near paid the whole, tho' in the most expensive Time that ever was.

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The Trade to *Africa* is allowed the first Cause that gives Life and Motion to the great Western Navigation, and what affects that first Cause must naturally affect all its Consequences to the same degree. The Negro is the Labourer which raises the *American* Productions of all sorts, Productions cause Freight and Navigation, the latter breeds Seamen, and in the whole are computed 800 or 1000 Sail of Ships, and 16000 Seamen annually employ'd in time of Peace in the Course of the *West-India* Trade.

And upon a farther View it will appear, that above 2 or 30000 Persons Livelihoods depend, more or less, on this great Navigation, which succeeds better or worse, according to the Increase or Decrease, or the good or bad carrying on the first Cause, the *African* Trade.

From whence 'tis plainly manifest, that if we mortgage or sell the *African* Trade to an Exclusive Company for 50000*l.* We certainly at the same time sell the whole Plantation-Trade, and all its Navigation to the same Company, to save 5000*l. per annum*, which is the same thing as to cut off a Man's Head, to save a cut Finger.

But if we must mortgage, sure 'tis best to do it to the most Advantage; Let a Branch of the Trade be sold first, that of *Jamaica*, then *Barbadoes*, and so on, till all our Foreign Trades are made Exclusive, or till we lose them all, as we have the *Greenland*-Trade, which is not likely to be recovered again to this Nation.

Sure when 'tis well considered, that the Increase and Support of our Foreign Trade was the chief Care of our wise Ancestors, and that from thence came all those animal Spirits, those Springs of Riches which have enabled us to spend 100 Millions for the sake of our Liberties, in a long and bloody War, we shall rather pursue the same Measures for the sake of our Posterity, than fall into the Account of selling our Trade to Exclusive Monopolies, the Badges of a slavish People, and always the greatest Grievance to the British Nation.

It was the last Year the grand Topick of the *African* Company, that this Trade could not be carried on to any Advantage but in an Exclusive Stock; Whereas the contrary is evident, for the Separate Traders, since this Trade was laid open, have undeniably improved this Trade, have employ'd greater Stocks, more Ships and Sailors, and exported more of our Woollen Manufactures, than ever the Company did when they were Exclusive. And this done at a time when the *African* Company laid all the Obstacles and Bars on the Separate Trade, that a designing mischievous Enemy could devise; and to deny this Truth, I challenge the whole Body of that Company; so that if this so beneficial a Trade was but freed from that Nest of Drones, the *African* Company, and Industry left at liberty farther to improve it, the Nation would quickly be convinced that nothing hitherto but an English Freedom has been wanting to extend the Trade over the whole Coast. And that on the contrary, Monopolies have ever been found to stop the Growth of Trade, Experience as well as Reason will demonstrate. The Instances both at home and abroad are too many, and too fresh in every ones Memory to require the Particulars. And the Reasons that Monopolies do always stop the Growth of Trade, are altogether as obvious; for when Trade is confined to a few, who are in no Apprehension to be outdone by any Rival, they are not likely to take extraordinary Pains to improve it. Whereas when many carry on a Trade, their Industry and Ingenuity are always at work to outvie one another. 'Tis to this we owe all our great Discoveries in Trade. Besides as a Nations Riches consists in the Diffusiveness of them, so Trade, the Source of Riches, ought to be as extensive and diffusive, but I will not spend too much of your Time on a Subject, in which the greatest Part of Mankind are already agreed.

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